

Letters to The Times

Policy for Latin America

Competence of Officials Conducting Affairs Is Assessed

TOMAS EDITOR OF THE NEW YORK TIMES: We Westerners, who live in a semi-colonial condition, were assigned to having our affairs run by the Washington-New York power elite so long as it was reasonably competent. However, the Cuban debacle has made us wonder if our fates are not in the hands of an incompetent elite within the elite.

These doubts seem justified in view of the fact that the Cuban nightmare was incubated within the knowledge of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and the House Foreign Affairs Committee, which consist in general of able and honorable men and which in our system cannot—at least should not—be passed over in an authoritarian fashion. It becomes a mockery for President Kennedy to proclaim that we live in an open society.

At the same time President Kennedy talks vaguely of the merits of press censorship. The reverse is true. Through its monthly journal, *The Hispanic American Report*, this institute provided analyses of developments in the Caribbean and Central America each month, and events have tragically borne out everything we said.

Ignorance of Press

The information we gave was common knowledge in responsible (as well as irresponsible) circles in the area, and Cuban intelligence, which was unquestionably informed about everything, must have realized that the American press refused to pay attention to United States activities which were so absurd as to lead inevitably to disaster.

While we must accept censorship in military matters such as the capabilities of our weapons, it is grotesque and quite un-American to turn over the conduct of our affairs to a group of operators who seem like characters out of a comic movie about Russia.

Who is behind these operators? Certainly not any trained specialist in Latin American affairs. In general, our department-plugged universities do not produce them, except in specific fields which are only partially relevant for the total comprehension of contemporary Latin America.

Moreover, while we insist that only a surgeon should perform surgery, we turn over the conduct of our relations with foreign areas to anyone who has an air of competency. He may be a perfectly honorable professor of United States history or of law, but this does not make him competent in the highly technical field of inter-American affairs. Let us not speak of the others whose names (we hope) are known only to God and the C.I.A.

History's Ironies . . .

It seems evident that our policies have been influenced by powerful, though rather ignorant, individuals, many of whom, in their right way, have felt a keen sense of duty to protect American interests, legitimate interests which were entrusted to them. Of such tragic ironies is history made.

Unfortunately, these individuals, who combine dutifulness with opportunism and loyalty with cynicism, have allied this country with Middle American leaders who are at best decent men, whose history has washed aside and at worst utter scoundrels. Fortunately, this history will probably never be written.

The United States is proud that after a reasonable number of years it makes state papers available. However, I have heard of no plans to make the records of the C.I.A. available to historians, and much of what has gone on is not entrusted to paper. We can only hope that as history becomes more and more of an impossible science, all these things will pass away and be forgotten.

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